

Hon. Aimee K. Jorjani
Chairman

Leonard A. Forsman
Vice Chairman

John M. Fowler
Executive Director



March 24, 2020

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman, House Committee
On Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, House Committee
on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairwoman, Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2256 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member, Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
1124 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chairwoman McCollum, and Ranking Member Joyce:

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) would like to express its support for coronavirus stimulus funding for State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). Established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the ACHP is the independent federal agency charged with advising the President and Congress on matters relating to historic preservation.

SHPOs and THPOs play a critical and foundational role in advising and assisting federal agencies regarding the effects on historic properties of projects they carry out, license, or assist, pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. § 306108). Cumulatively, on average, 110,000 such projects a year are reviewed by SHPOs and THPOs, including important infrastructure projects. SHPOs also review private development projects qualifying for the federal Historic Tax Credit. In FY 2019, they reviewed over 4,000 projects representing over \$12 billion in private investment. The current coronavirus outbreak has forced SHPOs and THPOs to implement more than usual levels of teleworking, to curtail operations, and in some cases to close. Some offices have limited or incomplete access to digital data on the state's or tribe's historic properties. To enable these critical authorities to function in the review of projects and Historic Tax Credit applications currently in the pipeline, funding is needed for the 57 SHPOs and 195 THPOs to acquire sufficient computer/communications hardware and software, increased bandwidth and speed, and increased security and remote IT support.

SHPO and THPO operations are funded by grants from the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) administered by the National Park Service (NPS). Additional HPF funding should be made available to SHPOs and THPOs to help them respond to the coronavirus pandemic. An immediate investment of

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\$50,000 per SHPO and \$25,000 per THPO (no match required) provided through the HPF would support short-term acquisition of necessary resources to maintain an efficient historic preservation review process and keep project planning and approvals in motion. Funding in the amount of \$250,000 would be needed for NPS administration of these grants. An additional \$3,000,000 would assist SHPOs and THPOs in longer-term efforts to enhance digitization of records and mapping on an as-needed or competitive basis. This level of funding would require total supplemental funds from the HPF of \$10,975,000. (See attached table for a summary breakdown of costs.)

Scope of the Need

Recent information from the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers indicate that many basic communication and technology challenges prevent SHPO and THPO staff from fulfilling their responsibilities while working remotely. The coronavirus pandemic has led to several SHPOs and THPOs ceasing normal operations. Many offices are functioning but with scaled back resources limited only to information currently available remotely. In many instances, employees are able to carry out some work from home, but others cannot, especially in THPO offices.

In order to ensure the effective participation of these key partners in Section 106 reviews and avoid delaying critical projects, SHPO and THPO staff must have access to computers at home and in their office for exchanging information via email and other platforms, remote access to GIS systems, and other communication devices that can facilitate the exchange of information among their offices, federal agencies they interact with, the ACHP, and others. Addressing immediate connectivity needs would require software and hardware upgrades, expanded licenses, and dedicated human resources. Further, making telework more widespread, effective, and efficient requires additional bandwidth and speed.

Each state and tribe has its own system to maintain its inventory of cultural resources based on their IT requirements and what works best for it. In some cases, there has been limited digitization of location and other data, which further exacerbates the problem of maintaining SHPO and THPO effectiveness when working remotely. Addressing this problem also will necessitate additional funding to jump start digitization efforts as the coronavirus emergency plays out over the coming months.

The ACHP urges Congress to assist SHPOs and THPOs during this crisis to help ensure the continued advancement of projects carried out, licensed, or assisted by federal agencies. Action now will address immediate needs, and the ACHP looks forward to working with the Administration and the Congress in addressing future needs in later stimulus and recovery legislation. Please feel free to contact us to discuss this matter further. Our executive director, John Fowler, may be reached at (202) 517-0200.

Sincerely,



Aimee K. Jorjani
Chairman

Attachment

cc: House Natural Resources Committee

**Proposed Coronavirus Stimulus Funding for
State and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers**

State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs)	57 x \$50,000	\$2.850 million
Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs)	195 x \$25,000	\$4.875 million
National Park Service grants administration		\$250,000
SHPO/THPO grants for digitization		\$3 million
Total from Historic Preservation Fund		\$10.975 million